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State Planning Commission releases discussion paper on new Renewable Energy Policies for South Australia

The State Planning Commission has released a discussion paper that proposes new planning policies for South Australia's renewable energy sector, ahead of public consultation on the Planning and Design Code later this year.

South Australia is widely regarded as a national leader in the renewable energy sector, largely due to our enabling planning policy environment and natural conditions and landscape.

In 2018, renewable energy generation from wind and solar sources reached 51.2% of total electricity generation. Previously, the Australian Energy Market Operator projected South Australia's renewable power could account for 73% of the state's total power consumption by 2020/21.

Today, wind, solar and pumped-hydro are firmly established in SA as the three main pillars of renewable energy supply. They play a crucial role in reducing global carbon emissions that drive climate change, as well as helping to provide long-term energy security by lowering our reliance on non-renewables like coal and gas.

The Commission's discussion paper proposes to update existing planning policies to ensure they keep pace with the rapidly changing technology that underpins renewable energy generation.

"The introduction of the new state-wide Planning and Design Code in July 2020 provides an opportunity to update our policies to reflect new forms of energy generation, storage and distribution," said State Planning Commission member Allan Holmes.

"It is also an opportunity to provide improved guidance for industry regarding the intensity, location and impacts of these developments to address community and environmental concerns," he said.

Due to technological improvements and less-costly infrastructure, large-scale renewable energy, dominated by wind generation in the past, is now turning to a wider range of energy options including large-scale solar developments, pumped-hydro and battery storage projects.

Beyond these more familiar renewable energies, a range of emerging technologies including geo-thermal, hydrogen and biofuels are also being explored.

Given these changes, South Australia's planning policy needs to be strengthened and updated to provide improved guidance for individual on-site renewable energy generation, as well as improved pathways for planning approval.

Specifically, the *Discussion Paper on Proposed Changes to Renewable Energy Policy in the Planning and Design Code*, includes:

- Policy to address large-scale renewable energy facilities
- Policy to encourage energy facility development in appropriate areas and to restrict it in environmentally and culturally significant areas
- Policy to deal with amenity and noise concerns such as setback distances that provide greater separation, including:
 - A two kilometre wind turbine setback plus ten metres per additional metre of turbine height above a tower height of 150 metres from townships and urban areas
 - A 1.2 kilometre wind turbine setback from dwellings not associated with the development
 - A 500 metre solar farm setback from conservation areas, a 100 metre setback from township boundaries and a 30 metre setback from neighbouring land.
- Policy to address the decommissioning and rehabilitation of renewable energy sites
- Policy to provide public notification of all wind farms
- The referral level to the Environment Protection Authority to be amended from 'regard' to 'direction', ensuring that appropriate noise-related conditions are incorporated into final conditions of approval for wind farm developments.

These new and updated policies are being proposed under the biggest modernisation of South Australia's planning system in more than 20 years.

When finalised, they will be released as part of the Planning and Design Code which is the cornerstone of South Australia's new planning and development system, replacing the 72 Development Plans that are currently in use across the state.

"The Code will offer a single, consolidated set of planning 'rules' for assessing development applications including those relating to renewable energy projects," said Mr Holmes.

"It will also address planning issues that are specific to new and emerging renewable energy technologies that are not covered by the current planning system," he said.

Formal public consultation on the draft Code, including the Commission's proposed renewable energy policies, will commence in October this year.

To download a copy of the discussion paper visit www.saplanningportal.sa.gov.au. Informal feedback on the discussion paper can be provided ahead of the public consultation period to saplanningcommission@sa.gov.au.

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